

THE
CRITICAL REVIEW:
OR,
Annals of Literature.

BY
A SOCIETY of GENTLEMEN.

VOLUME the TWENTY-THIRD.

— Nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice. SHAKESPEAR.

*Ploravere suis non respondere favorem
Speratum meritis*— HOR.


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P R E F A C E .
TO THE
TWENTY-THIRD VOLUME
OF THE
CRITICAL REVIEW.

AS the Authors of the Critical Review seldom solicit an audience from the Public on their own account, they hope to meet with indulgence on the present occasion.

It has been remarked, 'That the highest character a judge can acquire, is that of pleasing both parties, or neither.' The truth of this observation the Critical Reviewers lately experienced; having perceived, from several anonymous publications, that their impartiality has excited a kind of jealousy between the Dunces of England and Scotland, which terminates in each party abusing the Critical Review.

The authors of this work took an early opportunity of declaring, 'That they never pretended to infallibility in criticism, or presumed

to decide with dogmatical authority : they have delivered their sentiments as opinions only, supported with reasons on which every reader may exercise his own understanding.'---They flatter themselves with having generally acted in strict conformity to those professions : though they consider it as a misfortune inseparable from the nature of their undertaking, if their observations have disgusted a few persons of real genius ; but must, at the same time, declare, that they have been always open to conviction, reproof, and information.

They are inclined to think, that if they had not endeavoured to discourage that destructive antipathy which political prejudices had raised in England against the inhabitants of North-Britain, it would have been impossible for their most inveterate enemy to charge the Critical Reviewers with forming a Scotch conspiracy to depreciate English literature ; especially as many instances might be produced in which they have treated the writers of that country very freely, and even declared *, ' It is a melancholy truth, that every idle Scotchman who will not, or cannot earn his bread by the employment in which he was brought up, commences author, and undertakes to translate books into a language of which he is entirely ignorant.'

* See Number I. page 81,

A time of public discontent is the harvest of poor authors, because the most despicable scribbler can then render himself of importance with the vulgar, either by flattering their prepossessions, or gratifying their spleen. It was against such alone the Critical Reviewers declared war: they thought it their duty to endeavour to expel the poison of national animosity, by exposing the unjustifiable manner in which it was propagated; and took every opportunity of shewing, that such writers were equally dull and rancorous. Their attention was fixed not upon England or Scotland, but upon truth and falsehood, upon liberal and illiberal publications; in short, they were accused of taking part in a national dispute merely because they thought themselves obliged, on all occasions, to point out how intimately dulness is connected with faction.

Such are the sources of the impotent attacks made upon the Critical Reviewers by those, and those only, who have felt the justice of their decisions. Lest this assertion should carry with it some appearance of arrogance, they humbly beg leave to put the following question to every disinterested reader of sense, candour, and learning: Whether he knows any work subsist, in a tolerable degree of reputation with the public, after having been condemned by the authors of this Review? If any such work can be produced, the authors are willing to make a public retractation.

If

If no such instance can be brought, they hope the inference is fair, when they say, that it amounts to an acknowledgment of their never having condemned any work of real, permanent, merit; and consequently, that the abuse they have had so often and so plentifully bestowed upon them, rises from writers of a contrary character.

The test to which they appeal is the more trying for them, as both their friends and enemies have a large field of investigation.—They now enter on the twenty-third volume of their work, consequently the pieces they have reviewed are multifarious, and afford numerous objects of enquiry. They may, therefore, safely conclude this address to the Public, with two lines from a poet not only of great genius, but long experience, the late Dr. Young:

Time is the judge ; Time has no friend nor foe :

False fame must wither, and the true will grow.

